Records Management Training

Module 1 Part B

United States Army

Course Objectives

Upon completing Part B, you will:

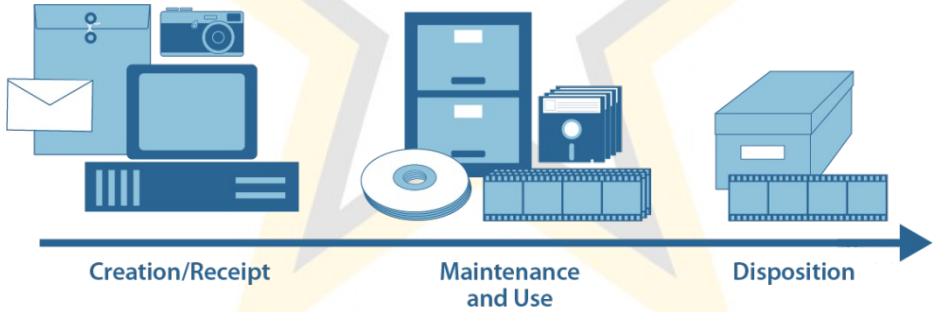
- Become familiar with the lifecycle of a record
- Understand the role of a Records Retention Schedule and record cutoffs
- Be prepared in the event of a records freeze, and
- Be able to identify Vital Records and the critical purpose they serve.

What is a Records Lifecycle?

A record’s lifecycle can be viewed as the phases in a record’s “life span”.

The lifecycle starts when the record is created or received by an agency, through its use, maintenance, and storage before finally being destroyed or archived permanently.

The lifecycle of a record consists of the following three phases:



Records Lifecycle

Now let’s talk about each phase.

Records Lifecycle

The first phase is **Creation / Receipt**.

During this phase, records are created, collected, or received by an office in order to support a business function.

The second phase is the **Maintenance and Use** phase.

While being used, the record is organized and stored with similar material. This phase can include activities such as filing, retrieving, use, duplication, printing, and dissemination.

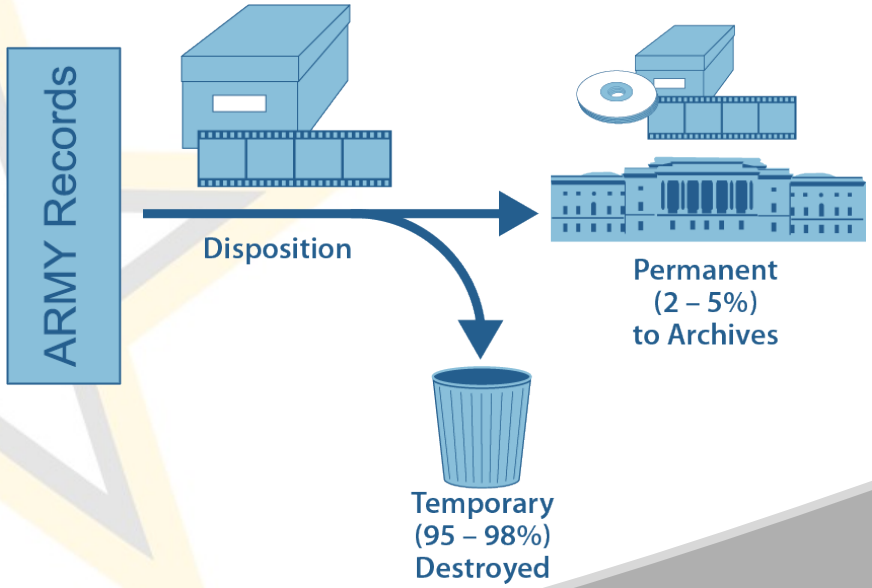
Disposition is the third and final phase in a record's lifecycle.

"Disposition" refers to approved actions that are applied to records that are no longer needed for current government business.

Records Lifecycle

During the disposition phase, depending on whether records are temporary or permanent, they may be:

- Lawfully destroyed
- Transferred to an approved Records Holding Area (RHA), Army Electronic Archive (AEA) or Federal Records Center (FRC) for storage, or
- Transferred to NARA for permanent archival preservation



Instructions for what to do at the disposition phase are provided in a Records Retention Schedule that has been approved by NARA.

What is a Records Retention Schedule?

A **Records Retention Schedule**, also known as a **Disposition Schedule** or simply a **Schedule**, is a document that provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records no longer needed for current Government business.

The instructions specify:

- When records should be moved to an approved on or off-site storage area
- When temporary records must be destroyed or deleted, and
- When permanent records are to be transferred to NARA’s ownership

What is a Records Retention Schedule?

Per 44 U.S.C. 3303, agencies are required by law to develop **agency records schedules** which cover all of their records that are not covered by the General Records Schedules (GRS).

The GRS, issued by NARA, provides disposition instructions for records that are common to multiple agencies of the Federal Government. Use of the GRS is mandatory, unless an exception is granted by NARA.

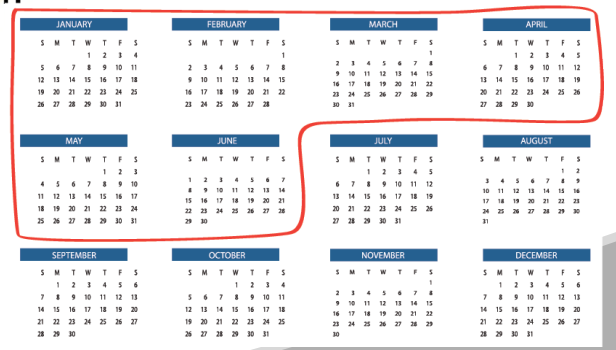
What is a Records Retention Schedule?

36 CFR 1228 requires each agency to schedule all their records within two years of the agency's establishment and to schedule the records of a new program within one year of its implementation.

All Records Schedules must be approved by NARA before they can be used. Per 44 U.S.C. 3309, some schedules must also be approved by the General Accounting Office (GAO) before NARA will approve them.

Once approved by NARA, retention periods in the schedules are mandatory and must be applied to records.

Records Schedules also provide instructions on when a group of files (known as a records series) is to be cut off.



What are Record Cutoffs?

Record cutoffs, also referred to as **file breaks,** are points at which files are separated.

Records should be cut off to:

- Permit their disposal or transfer to storage or to NARA in complete blocks, and
- To allow new files to be established

A record cutoff should be based on a time, specific action/event, or combination of the two. For example:

- The end of a fiscal or calendar year
- A time after an event has occurred or an action is completed
- The end of the year in which the event has occurred or the action has been completed

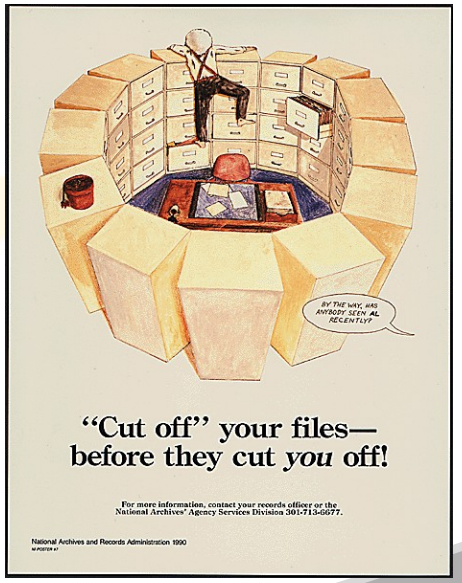
Cutoffs are needed before disposition instructions can be applied because record retention periods begin with the cutoff and not with the creation or receipt of the record.

What is a Record Cutoff?

Cutoffs make it faster to locate records and yield a savings in space and equipment.

Nonrecord materials do not always require cutoffs but should be purged periodically

Unscheduled records should also be cutoff to make their disposition possible once they have been scheduled.


BY THE WAY, WAS ANYBODY SEEN AL RECENTLY?
"Cut off" your files—
before they cut *you* off!
For more information, contact your records officer or the National Archives' Agency Services Division 301-713-6677.
National Archives and Records Administration 1990

Unscheduled Records

As previously stated, all records have to be scheduled, and all records schedules have to be approved by NARA.

Per 36 CFR 1220.14, Unscheduled Records are records which do not have a records retention schedule that has been approved by NARA.

While waiting for schedule approval, unscheduled records:

- Must NOT be destroyed
- Must be treated and maintained as permanent records
- Must be maintained in the current files area until scheduled

Once the schedule is approved by NARA, the approved disposition instructions must be applied to the records unless a records freeze has been imposed.

What is a Records Freeze?

A **records freeze**, **preservation order, moratorium, litigation hold,** or **legal hold**

is any action or event that prevents specific records from lawful destruction until the freeze

is lifted or for an indefinite period of time. Examples of why records may be frozen include:

- Ongoing litigation
- Records Schedule Updates
- Investigations and audits

Where Do Records Freezes Come From?

RMDA receives notification of a records freeze from the Army Headquarters, the Army General Counsel, the Department of Defense, or the Department of Justice.

How Do You Know When There Is A Records Freeze or When A Freeze Is Lifted?

RMDA informs Army Commands who in turn notify their subordinates or supported Activities, who then notify you.

What is a Records Freeze?

When there is a Records freeze all information, whether records, drafts, working papers or nonrecords, regardless of media, is subject to the freeze.

Records affected by a freeze cannot be destroyed as scheduled and must be held until the freeze is lifted before normal disposition can be continued.

What Should You Do When There Is Records Freeze?

- Conduct a search for responsive material
- Identify and separate all potentially responsive material
- Immediately halt the destruction of all records and responsive material
- Preserve all findings until asked to produce them or until the freeze is lifted

In some cases, you and / or your chain of command may be required to sign an affidavit attesting to findings related to the freeze

What is a Records Freeze?

Note that records that could (and should) have been destroyed prior to the freeze must now be retained. This means that if you did not follow your approved records schedule and you still have old material on hand, you **cannot** destroy it until the freeze has been lifted.

When a freeze is lifted, the approved records disposition is carried out from the original date of the record and not the end of the freeze.

A records freeze, as you have learned, is an exception to the rule.

Another exception to the rule is an important category of records known as Vital Records.

Lets talk a little about Vital Records

Vital Records

Vital records are copies of essential records created and maintained solely in case of a disaster.

Vital Records enable an agency to keep, continue, or resume functioning, and should be incorporated into your Command's overall disaster plan.
By law, every federal agency is required to establish and maintain a Vital Records Program.

Emergency Operating Records are vital records essential to the continued operations of an organization during and after an emergency and must be immediately accessible. Examples include:

- Emergency/Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan
- Orders of succession, delegations of authority, and staffing assignments

Vital Records

Rights and Interest Records, are vital records needed to protect you and your agency's essential functions, activities, and rights. Examples include:

- Titles, deeds, contracts, and leases
- Personnel files

Vital Records should be destroyed when they become outdated or are replaced by more current records.

Vital records are important to helping your agency recover from a disaster in a timely fashion and should be updated regularly.

For more on Vital Records, see 36 CFR Part 1236 – Management of Vital Records.

Hang on for just a couple more minutes!

You need to know what tool the Army uses to organize its records. Let's touch very briefly on the Army's file plan.

File Plans

File plans specify how records should be organized in an office once they have been created or received.

The Army’s file plan is the Office Records List (ORL). It:

- Provides key information about the type of records being created and associated record numbers for a specific office
- Helps you identify records, retrieve records quickly, and dispose of records no longer needed

This comprehensive records list is essential to properly manage records.

References

Federal Regulations

- 36 CFR, Chapter 12, Subpart B - Federal Records Management
  - 1220.34 Creation of Records
  - 1220.36 Maintenance and Use of Records
  - 1220.38 Disposition of Records
  - 1222 Creation and Maintenance of Federal Records
- 36 CFR 1236.14 - Definition of Vital records

ny Policy & Guidance

Pam 25-403 Department of the Army Pamphlet, Guide to Recordkeeping in the A

25-1 Army Information Technology

Websites

US Army RMDA

National Archives and Records Administration